



Connecticut Farm Bureau Association

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The following testimony is submitted on behalf of the Connecticut Farm Bureau, a statewide nonprofit membership organization of over 5,000 families dedicated to farming and the future of Connecticut agriculture.

Senator Meyer, Representative Gentile and Members of the Environment Committee:

Raised Bill No. 311 AN ACT CONCERNING CERTAIN FARM RELATED DESIGNATIONS ON HIGHWAY SIGNS. The Connecticut Farm Bureau strongly supports SB311. This bill will expand existing law to allow directional and other official signs or notices pertaining to farming that is part of state's agricultural tourism within the six-hundred-sixty foot area of interstate, primary and other limited access highways. Agriculture continues to grow in Connecticut and the recently released USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service points out that we have 1,000 more farms that we did just 5 years ago. One of the fastest growing segments of agriculture is on-farm retail operations. These farms are welcoming the public onto their farms and providing a wonderful combination of family entertainment and expansion of the CT Grown experience. The Connecticut *Still Revolutionary* tourism campaign has highlighted several farm operations in its ads. On-farm marketing represents one of the best opportunities for growth of Connecticut agriculture. This bill will help consumers find the farms they wish to visit. We support this important bill.

Raised Bill No. 315 AN ACT CONCERNING FARMER'S MARKET WINE SALES PERMITS AND ESTABLISHING AN OFF-SITE FARM WINERY SALES AND TASTING PERMIT. The Connecticut Farm Bureau is supportive of the emerging Connecticut wine industry. In many ways the wine business serves as a model for other forms of value-added agriculture and agri-tourism. It serves as a great example of how local producers can engage consumers and produce products and experiences that highlight our agricultural resources. Our hope is that as the Connecticut wine business continues to mature, the number of acres dedicated to growing fruit for wine and brandy will become a significant use of our agricultural land base. The Connecticut Farm Bureau supports Raised Bill No. 315. This bill would authorize the Commissioner of Consumer Protection to issue a limited number of off-site wine sales and tasting permits to holders of a manufacturer permit for a farm winery. Farm wineries approved for permits would be allowed to offer free samples and sell wine by the bottle at up to seven fairs and other off-site events per year. This is a great way to expose consumers who attend special events to Connecticut wines and allow them to purchase the wines they taste. The bill also allows wineries that have a farmer's market wine sales permit issued by the Commissioner of Consumer protection to offer tastings at such farmers markets which will help consumers know what they are buying and likely increase sales at farmer's markets. The Connecticut Farm Bureau supports SB315 in order to expand the marketing opportunities to this growing segment of agriculture.

Raised Bill No. 5419 AN ACT CONCERNING THE PRESERVATION OF THE SAVIN FARM IN LEBANON. The Connecticut Farm Bureau supports the protection of the Savin Farm in Lebanon as outlined in HB5419. This bill provides a mechanism to protect this unique and substantial agricultural

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resource for the future of Connecticut. Just like the Southbury Training School that was protected last year, the fact that the land is already owned by the state does not protect it from future development or fragmentation that would result in the loss of this special resource. By permanently protecting this land we will add hundreds of acres to our protected farmland at very little cost to the taxpayers. The Farmland Preservation Advisory Board conducted a study of the Savin Farm as well as several other state-owned properties to evaluate the appropriateness of protecting the lands for permanent agricultural use. Each property was ranked using the same criteria that the Farmland Preservation Program uses when evaluating a farm for purchase of development rights. Not surprisingly the Savin Farm, like the Southbury Training School property ranked extremely high, confirming what many already knew: this is an agricultural gem that also deserves to be permanently protected using the same innovative mechanism already developed. HB5419 provides for the creation of a permanent conservation easement that would be held by a qualified third party non-profit organization with competency and experience in holding agricultural conservation easements. The ownership of the fee title would remain in the State of Connecticut. The Commissioner of Agriculture would be granted authority to manage and lease the land to farmers subject to the terms of the easement. The involvement of the third-party easement holder will help the state by assisting in the role of stewardship through monitoring and enforcement of the terms of the conservation easement. All of this mirrors the language passed into law last year to protect the Southbury Training School property. The Connecticut Farm Bureau wholeheartedly supports this effort to permanently protect this important farmland resource.